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Madrugada

by

Natalie Peeterse

B.A. School for International Training, 1999

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

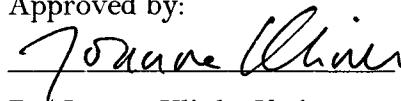
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Master of Fine Arts

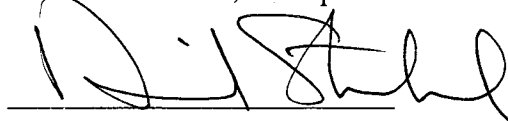
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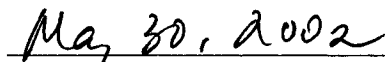
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I would annex the planets if I could; I often think of that.
It makes me sad to see them so clear and yet so far.
-Cecil Rhodes

Who knows how long we'll take to learn
To live as stars—
Free in the midst of what is without end
And needing no one to feed us.
-Alfonso Cortés

Madrugada/ Daybreak

Television screens flicker blue light
out of barrio windows, hours opening onto littered
night pavement. They move this way almost

always, walking the phosphorescent measured
time of the days that will remake
me, the same rigid form as the ground

against the snare of cleared sky.
Something is sleeping and something is waking
there across my skin and the rough cover

of a moon. Knots of streetlamps count out
an unsteady gleam and I hardly consider
their resonance in every direction. Past

the skyline the silver roofs flatten
to a blue that is listening, that cannot
remember its own overturned wheel of days.

change

has its shine
like stars when they light and swell
in my hand ten

silvery *cordobas* I pay
the Nicaraguan cab driver with
heavy music asks me to marry
him has been waiting all this time

I am taken I say
by the same helplessness
that pulled the others under
when the hurricane came to count
us loam and wind
people slid down my shoulder
and into rivers you did not
ask why because you were
not there my body a window
that does not open does not
close when it should

Restoration

The coolest place is inside León's cathedral, standing
here for a bit of shade since 1747. The quiet

around Rubén Darío's tomb says little
about *the flaring gold of Nicaraguan sun*.

Vilma Martinez says *we heard a sound*.
From this cool wooden pew it is hard to imagine

that *my children and I went rolling with everything*
that came down. Don Julito talks about heading up

to the fields in North Carolina.
A sound like a plane and we thought people,

had come to rescue us because our
houses were filling with rain. They lied

to Spain about the first plans for this Cathedral.
They were considered too splendid,

and to avoid scandal Spain was sent
a plainer version. Antonio Sarria's *Stations of the Cross*

hangs with the cathedral's failing
plaster. *You have to stay*

close with them, the president said about the survivors
who held above the sea of mud.

Next to Darío's tomb is a sorrowful lion.
At the edge of town there had been a place

for Vilma to rest before looking to restore things,
enough to suffice at least under Darío's sun.

She is young enough to find the damage.
She has gone out into his remote springtime.

Después

We follow a guide on a mule down a dried ravine.
Cholera is spreading quickly and no one
can prove a thing about themselves,
it has all been carried away. We line them up
and no one smiles for publicity photos
once they receive their bag of beans.
A few folks stand in a quiet line and one by one
try to prove the number of children they have left.
Neighbors confirm or deny these facts.
There is no water, todo esta contaminado.
One man, shirtless in dark jeans,
holds a baby girl in a pink dress above his head
and shakes her. Ella es mi hija.
No one notices so he says it again louder,
her head begins to lag lazily behind her body
in his hands. Mi hija,
words spread on the dust down every dry gulch,
ellos estan— people stream in through the half-light
like the rain must have— slow at first and then
in uncountable waves, the lines of them
dissolving in anger and confusion, the man
and the baby girl swallowed by arms
and the aid truck rolling through the crowd,
still full, sky giving way to more stars than seem possible,
dust pooling in our skin and in our hair, and the few
still running after the truck fall out of view
until they are viscous wind, only stones pulled from sky.

Sunmaker

*This is a slow and
timid art* she says while
she folds and curls each one.

*You can build something
with sticks, ten pennies, a hook*
she says. A something. She

squints when she
is a sage. Her skin is paper
too, her skin is glory. *Hooks*

*are a glory that
will pull you in from this place.*
And one day, she says

she will start to fold and curl
them in new paper, a promenading
white paper. Full boxcars,

so many, just enough, *I must
make something with all of my shame,*
she said. Like the flowers,

three for one dollar
is all they cost in the heat,
on the hills of this town.

The Old Man Who Tends the Memorial at Posoltega

He knows the moment will tick itself out and be over, that grief sleeps, too, like the volcano he and his family built a home on. So he waits, rubbing the red mesh of an old *frente* ballcap between his fingers, the white letters *FSLN* faded under sweat and rain. Then walking from one end of the memorial to the other, bending to pull weeds and touch the cool cement, he looks up to where the crater lake rose to meet the storm. At the wide swath its overflowing cleared, folding all but a few into a roar that calls after him even now, years after the mudslide. He says so they know they are mourned, *I remember the eleven days of rain. Just rest.*

Damnificado/Victim

Powder of a drowned horse
at my feet. As if he had cut the walls
of this canyon with the sure

color of his hooves, running
as the new river chases,
slams into him with its noise.

He drifts and then dries
into an outline of ribs and an ear
beneath the slow field of the sky.

Bone colored rain carved this riverbed.
Above us are the tatters of harvest.
And dirt on hot air

like movements of tired people—
and the crowns of trees—
twitching, and then still.

Down the floodplain
is the arc of a young
man's swing. Neck bent, breaking

open ground like wind
through the stretch and hiss of wet clouds,
toward clean water.

His cattle surround the hole and he
is working on a name for the few
more hours left in the day.

Indulgence

At the foot of the gate, two busted
bicycles and an earless stuffed raccoon.
On the porch, a rocker and a lazy black lab.
Shredded blue plastic shopping bag.
Who is this a man? The hum of mayflies
is like the hum of a new Lexus. A shaded pecan tree.
She falls out of the car onto her palms
and everything is sticky and newly compromised.
The midday sky is white at the horizon, just above
the ridge of rooftops. Rock hills and tall cacti. She does
an awkward somersault away from him
and the car rolls forward. Is there some reason,
suddenly, not to want to be alone? *Bitch*
he says out the window, more
calmly than seems appropriate.
The front yard is gravel and dirt, deep
green weeds splatter and connect
in vine-like tangles through abandoned
pipes and half-eaten flip-flops. The telephone
wires are sloppily draped. There is sun,
discontent, but the center of the sky
is post-card blue, a little bleached-out
from whole seasons on the rack by the store window
in the sun. She pushes herself
upright, smoothes her brown, newly cut bob.
If the choice is fight or flight, please
hold yourself. There is a hand
on her shoulder, so sorry she says.
And the heat shimmers behind most things.

Mercado Oriental

Nicaragua's reinsertion into the global economy was to be based on a modernized agro-export sector emphasizing nontraditional exports.

-William I. Robinson *Nicaragua Without Illusions*

Pablito has a baby food jar
filled with a yellow glue
meant for sealing the soles of shoes
tight his mouth fits tight
over the mouth of the jar he breathes
 in and sighs out
folding himself
into an unused stall
near the trash with the other boys
in a pair of dusted red shorts he'll doze
the ground heavy on his skin
sometimes Pablito will leave
for home sometimes he will wander
the city *una cordoba porfa*
heading to the Palacio Nacional sometimes
 Pablito will go away
with a traveler who likes boys
with an aid
 worker who saves boys
sometimes he will run
errands for change
sometimes if Pablito breathes enough
he forgets where he is
 lopes forward
towards a horizon that must have curves
where she is waiting she has told him
so many things he remembers but
can't figure during Purísima she said
the same thing all of the nights
 He stuns you by degrees -

~

through the rickety charge of stalls
 plastic sandals, yards of tarp to protect
 from the late afternoon rain
 perfumes, small paper packets of downers
 speed and Viagra malaria pills
 rows of bottled rum *Flor de Caña* *Ron Plata*
 men delicately swaying with a few pesos and
 old plastic water bottles to be refilled
 with clear and treacherous moonshine *tyacan*
 fresh flowers, avocados
 platanos frying pitaya fruits limes
 the north in abundance not one
 coffee bean but tin cans of instant
 sugar, brown in big crystals
 a man in heavy black
 eyeliner and a black lace top
 selling pantyhose and dresses
 sings *cosas bonitas para tí, muchachita*
 to a girl pleated blue school uniform
 headed for the barrels
 of rice and beans, chilies
 with two dollar bills in a fist
 and Pablito follows the narrow
 passageways
 newly carved meat
 a sweetness, warmth and a slight wind
 his sandals flip up the freshly
 washed cement floors of blood

~

the bus is seatless and everyone is balanced
 from the one metal bar in the middle of the floor
 where the women hold on tightly children below
 their arms everyone else holds onto an arm that holds onto
 an arm that holds the bar in the middle of the bus
 driver tears down half-moons the Rotundo
 Santo Domingo and heads

to the Oriental express
 in the passenger seat a bucket
 strapped in a tube sealed through the cover
 with silver tape coming from the top
 and out the glassless windshield
 Pablito is asked to buy gum in the bus lot pink coconut candy balls
 there are Belmonts matches five more pesos
 the noise of other children and
 engines he is the high whine of a cab or the driver or the *chisme*
 that passes between the women only the *entonce* audible
 as they wait to sell rocking chairs, mattresses he is
 bright flowered towels, TVs, barrettes and shampoos, aluminum
 pots, yellow plastic cups and plates he is iced bottles
 of Coke, Fanta older boys hustling
 bootleg tapes and CDs saving up for a new pair of fake Tommys
 a baseball hat nothing with a cowboy
 brim like Sandino's Pablito
 blare of horn the numbness
 heat and turpentine he
 is a tendril
 breathing at the same pace together
 in the ring the soot the sun
stand open
 stillness
 he walks out onto the field the sun
 he understands
 it is just him and the sky
 shoulder blades brittle a breathing
 false thing

receive

the white light as it scatters what
is at stake a second version
of the ocean sheetmetal calm
where the wandering poor scrub the surface
of the sun as it sets low and we
urge to make her night to make
 night so we can take
to the air above this lightless river of edges
where we manage as thin sound on waters
slowly bending to wave
inevitably we sweep to listen
before a second version of ourselves
 they will be counted each one
listen each one gone

Bajo la Lluvia/ In the Rain

You were a nameless visitor and they
named. The woman who shared
the bed of the red pick-up
was silent as it sped along, and her
blue-black hair rose behind you.
And then half of a roof was held up
by two poles and underneath sat a table.
This is where you set those things down.
She moved about in silence.
There was no one else.

Barrio Maximo Jerez

Your first morning will come by way
of the neighbor's rooster. Doña Maria will
fry you some breakfast before you leave

the barrio for wherever you plan on going.
Don't ask her if she needs anything.
She will. Also, do your own laundry.

If you accept her offer to wash clothes for you,
the price will go up every week until
you finally have to refuse. She will

walk you to where this barrio spills into another.
Don't look up at the drunks on the corners
when they say *chelita bonita* to you in a low voice,

be thankful it's a compliment and keep moving.
Maria will remind you her name and the name
of this place, so you can find your way back—

pass, if you get dengue fever, it will pass.
Chloroquine is bound to cause strange dreams,
try and enjoy them and if you dream the ground

is bouncing, that you've been asleep for weeks
and it has rained the entire time and the wind
is threatening to take you, you were never

asleep, go back to sleep. Under some heaviness
your bones are bending slowly, the days are passing
quickly and with little distinction, your reasons

for following this map less like the promise
of knowing and more like becoming lost
under the bright, unyielding lights of the grocery

store is now, is this moment swung, only
to be lifted and pushed by the next, the string
of longing always knotted to stop

way before you could have wandered so far.
And you are untethered
and there are eyes behind which

you cannot see, and you will not know
what it is like for some people, your mind
now the sparkling on the edges

of the walls around the patio where Maria
cemented broken glass, clear, thick
sections of coke bottles reflecting sunlight

through green edges, a shard of mirror
where the rain slides off the zinc roof
and collects in the shallow roots

of the lime tree, and the murals there
are like nothing you've ever seen—
there are farmers working alongside god.

Santa Julia

where cool air climbs through
doorways into floorboards
rain over land always
worked by the same hands
run over by the same
wind for years beyond days of desolation
or the quiet silhouette
of a mother's breast feeding
in shades boneless and out of focus I move
down stone steps under dog stars
past the coffee bodega to
a thin mattress the long
shells in my ears sound
the sea and bear shadows off
wooden pushcarts the dawn
laid down over gray bricks

Replication

Come back for a gentle
way to forget about water
and the season's

lethality. To walk
from the demands of light
is to walk to a home

where one cannot
show one's teeth. See
cold coming again, in the leaves

moving there. What is muted
in branches before you
doesn't call itself that.

They move, these
shapes, away from what can
be mimicked. Sounds

of them turn over, it is
dark. It is dark now
and the sound continues.

nehalem beach, oregon

above the trill of saltbitter winds and below
the tide-swell a low line along the beach chanting

the circumstance of the clear-shining
shallows as it changes with the high tide's

flood the fled sun and who knows how long
we'll take to move back missing our prints

as the sand's been overtaken again by a sink
of cold space free in the way of eventual

disappearance and return that I envy
these strange chronological washes

over sea-rubbed rocks and under
the slow spit of rain is a shelter

for fundamental things—
the blinded momentum of fish

phosphorescence and the rough
machinery of waves

Shell House

a fisherman and his son walk by
one holding a yellow rope net
the other a black plastic bucket
the clean sea runs in closer
and somebody is burning trash
burnt sugar in the air
and there is a big black pig
on the beach rooting

the four of us
live in a tiny house
made of shells
glued together by a few wet kids
on the west coast of Nicaragua

there is a window
a sturdy shell roof
cardboard floor and a view
that shifts as we make our way

up and down the beach
on the shoulder of a kid
in a blue and white school uniform
with teasing eyes there is
even a shell dog
on the corner of our house
to protect or entertain me

Yellow

Write a song in soot on someone's
back, the alphabet will wash off. Shake
and roll a charcoal song, breaths
that are space for mercy: the smell

of tomato vines, green and doubtful
as undershade, as a girlfight. Beg
with reticence for fixtures and dents
until it feels tight. Fathom your body

an instrument. The highway. Until they
give way. Tabletops, coffee grounds, they
all belong, mistrust them. Braid them.
Roll them up yellow, yellow's guilty

walking through the heat.
Good Christ, these crowds will us
entangle and the ants race for the cardboard.
They touch bricks under the skin,

purple and undaunted as the key of doubt
in your voice: brown beetles at sunrise,
then yellow, thermal dynamic, this explosion
of a star: empty city streets

after a rain just like a shiny
bathtub tile just like the contents
of a blowfish: blow. If he
breathes his insides glow.

Hotel Colón

Beyond the city and your broken
sleep there are people
syncopated in their breathing
with the sub-harmonic ring
of the building's electricity.
Most likely your pace
is set by theirs. You don't know
and can't follow. Can wait
in a small room farthest
from the gate of the lobby.
You are different now, the last
room beyond the desk and that
tiny silver bell. You've looked
back here, hovered above
yourself like the outline
of a bird suspended over the lake.
Why there are teeth marks
on everything you love. Remember
the low cloud coming over the room,
the city's heavy air. A thorn merchant
trades for this innocence, cords
of lightning, an ornament of panic
and moonlight you'll wrap around
yourself: this thing that still hasn't begun.

Refugio/ Refuge

In the biggest room women rock back
and forth on the cement floor, rawing it.
In the smallest room someone is sick.
In the storeroom some college kids from Vermont
sort colored t-shirts and eye their cots and fold.
The older girls warm rice in the kitchen
over a low flame. On the over-grown
soccer field ninety children run laps and howl
under the fragile command.
That night barred fathers will show up
and speak through the gate in low tones.
Mosquitoes will hum dryly
through the rooms and around
the perimeter of the place.
The next day the same.

Pan American Highway

Moving north, the windshield darkly tinted
and metallic letters read *Dios Es Mi Guía*
above the driver's head. Laid out
in front of us, collapsed bridge where
something had swelled. Wind's remnants in the few
standing trees and a bus like this one
in pieces, suspended. We progress alongside
of the fallen bridge in second gear, down
the embankment toward the border, *la frontera*—
a line in the dust of what has become
us and the name of a town not worth
remembering. Call it the spelling of things,
call it origination. Call it a crossing
on the map of this spot, so much quieter
than the land itself and the road
now a sharper swerve of red
to make it into Honduras. Make
a mark over the name of this place
and call it desire when the men get out
to wade in the drainage, guiding the bus
to the most solid ground. The light on their faces
a kind of confidence that some waters
are never mapped. Call it reckoning
when we make it back up onto the highway
and too quickly roll to a halt on solid road, digging
for our papers and the entry fee, to continue.

signal intelligence

the ocean a fence
on this side of it all she knows
the wind's insistence

of pitch the sound is high
and weary her feet
sink like sand into the sand
and across the expanse
of sea gray

green
she is listening
to the drought of this flat song
she has forgotten
for this still year this thick
year to code to know quit

the sound of static
tides of it she never sent
this drone to straighten and be
further heard she never cast this
single horizon

split

in 2 and fallen
open and only just reducible

oak limbs liquid in the way
they reflect light like water

standing they seem grown as if
exhalations she could grip

slant of branches tenuous
formed not by wind by piecing

together her own does she
have a hold on the open

numbers of the tree felled
in 2 halves and a single

structure single slight can
split the sky can clutch and edify—

and calm a newly withered
face emerging to ask

from her sadly where noise
meets noise for sustenance and to rise

like lines there is something terribly
serious about our travels

and our vast failure to gather
the pieces, and hold, and have a hold.

bloom

and there doesn't seem
to be the idea of spring
flowers like
women in long scarves
begging at the tv
all of those.
as long as:
how I wish and how I want
of the noise
just crushed
slowly to yourself.

about leaving.
and her threatening
moves of quiet having
to live this open
them quietly
open the months
slowly to yourself.
and sandstone burns

saying nothing
of your hands of
work and days
see her blue:
body in the night
recount the amount
like empty tin
cans rattling
slowly to yourself.
begin and pull

spin

in the predawn

 dark for days to disengage and round
 down like a warped record her white crawl
shines like the scales of fish shines like diligence and common
stones, unflawed orange skinned, whispering about it and stuck
 where nothing collapses and no one stands
in the path of suns there isn't anything
 on the other side of this
 swim, the reaching around us of arms
taken soon into a world where bodies have will
into this inter-hinged confrontation of star-lessness
electric transposition she will bear
each one's heaviness as the moon wheels in sloping
 surges the sky's pattern toward one
hour that won't quit we are exhausted by thievery

Ligament

Her phone cuts in and out because of the desert wind.
Her voice accustomed and abstracted—
if we go on as if nothing happened. The clean,
shaded ground under saguaros betrays
the monochrome of desert floor. Because
of the miles between us, she drove. In a tiny
red car down the road to Tucson, uninhabited
save small things. At intervals— I was at a garish
ceremony to mark the losing of my brother— will we
become roughened by use? There the wind changes
quickly, a gradual lessening in strength
if we find we falter. She is smoke
rising into that dry air.

Zimbabwe night train

there is a firecracker storm
in a corner of the sky a triangle
of black cloud and the rain
begins to shout I
cannot hear the hordes
of children and mothers
migrating down from the jammed
compartments of the slowed train
onto the red land rolling below the wind
wraps around them tightly
as they pass me smileless
devoted they disappear
onto the night savanna and I
pass a rusted derailed
steam engine busted carcass
that had sometime jumped
this track there are the new
stars then on the side
of an elephant the sky
is a bucket of pulled
teeth spilled out onto black glass

Marsella

Back light of the jungle's
limbs. Din of the Pacific
like a million insects convinced

of leaving. On each side
of the path to the sea, one
hundred blue crabs

unblinking in shallow pools.
Sky leaks through the canopy's
grate and in the distance a truck

stalls in mud on the road
to San Juan del Sur. Ahead
the path releases to sand.

The sea is burning.
The crabs watch golden-eyed,
clicking against one another.

Florence, Arizona

Only the low brown of dried cotton fields
to measure the shock of blue sky. Policemen
roaming the paved streets, reciting
license plate numbers cleanly into their radios
as if it were an *oracion* to the only power here—
the sun so prominent in everything
that its glare off aluminum beer cans and trailer roofs
is necessary to even speech. Wrens rush
in and out of saguaro limbs, a white
Chevy Lumina parks in the gravel outside
of Pastor Dale Storm's fundamental, independent
Baptist Church and a dusty kid tags the hull
of the town's water tower, still too young to fear
the fall, the thud of an orange from a bending
citrus tree. A guard climbs the steps
to her apartment, hands in her hip pockets
as the sun glints from the miles of fence
around the detention centers. A prisoner's sister
flicks through the cable channels at the Blue Mist Hotel,
a wasp in the bougainvillea and a fighter jet
flying low across the desert beyond
gives the sky one white streak, then another.

swim

the way the temperature dropped
and in this version you are silent

for days beautiful light snow
a weightlessness associated only with light

traveling and then a paper horizon
and clouds cross outside

of your window—one tree, two leaves
no sea and later one star events

on the plain of your face
from all of its sources between us

the landscape of what you might withstand
and the nightwater coming up

right from the floor, oh
swim wide within this

room there isn't any
kicking and no voice from the window

its warm inside and in it one body
your floating life and two tides

Mitigation

Remember hunger when flame
revives the belly of the land
and becomes the tongue's

unhinged transgression
the shape of fire at its middle
folding the sky inside out for a call

to water in a fury breaching
this dusk of growth the myth
of the blaze will rival the new

sun raze its skin and rearrange
the kilter of the sunlight's
luminosity was made to fly

upward as the sky is raw and blue
footed against the smoke
within the fire's circuit of orange

hoops a place with no
sense of past to watch the sweep
the bitter arcs of boundary red

where it is a dawnstar
an incandescent shelter
rolling across the horizon onto this

beautiful stark landscape of fuel
tell me who will next receive
the warmth of the sun's ascending

the knife's passage over the land's
blue-black backbone this suspicion
of their not being human not being

able behind their eyes here
are my hands here
are the field's unpieced suns

Causeway

I never call this rough country
and I never call it cloud. The slick
realm of a nation rises with
rain. Drops of it rearrange
themselves and I never say
I believe. In the sharp tug
of light, I overrun my banks
and recede before this, paving its way
toward me, an extravagance.
They die right in front of my motionless
hands. My retreat—order,
a place to give and lay flat
on the causeway. I cannot
hold to the crossing and I cannot
watch with so much. I never
say that I see, and I see how
it all gives way. It all gives way.

Saltwinds

Having been at grief for so long and still not rising,
I settled to run to the flats. Only the song
of field there to remember, only the song
of smoke on this straight I myself couldn't recall.
In the heat of day there was just the small-rented solace
in the tallness of my shade and the constant of it
to trust, and in sleep sometimes I returned to my home
where the people of my life walked and fell.
Where the noise of them wanted an answer I cannot say—
almost thirty years and still hollowed out old buildings
and the new ones no taller than two stories.
Don't mind the scrawny dogs, they belong to somebody.
And all around us a bluish white chemical element,
a coating for iron and steel: the city wide
with its sky stained by fire and mud.

Along Calle 27 de Mayo the earth collapsed
and smoldering. How it tips hungrily toward the sun
and if this heart bleeds out all of its color until
only it reflects light and spins like the glass chandelier
we are moving under, who will fall through a window
overlooking the shoreline where the earth broke open.
Break us open where a silver-tongued stain begins to leak
and thrill and orbit your grief and sometimes
we are alone in a green room and I have seen
my skin in you and you do not touch me.
We are not in that city, we cannot hear the waves
and you have become *ocean* and the sound of everyness
and this field is our leaving—you remember it and you speak.
Say, you are all light and nothing's darkness.
Say, here is a fistful of dust so that he'll fight with her
until it breaks, the city breaks among the cars
and lights and I cannot say—to have swallowed the news quietly
with the magpies and trash and you walking—I cannot
say but if the morning should lift this hem for you I will wear
a green dress for you imagine the saltwater

and the men speaking faces turned against the morning
wind blowing against their white shirts. We have waited
to be taken to the ocean: the winter the city of Managua
fell in a heap of zinc slats and bones melted into the air
where the children smote, where the belly broke: the red
of one cut of glass billowing to stay the taken soon, to stay—
as silver is the ore of all metals and the scales
of fish: dull storefronts beaming neon and cars
warming exhaust—fractured sidewalks that go ahead.
You sit next to me, we watch them float, later
the saltwinds and I will walk with you through the ruins
where there is little wind and the ground beneath us is so still.
In Virginia Beach smoke will stream across a dance floor
(and isn't gray the ocean-god's girl)—my brother is wearing
his dress blues and holding his bride and isn't
blue the table on which evening rests: nightclub lights
wrapping around blocks, girls in tiny skirts unable to linger
for the wind—waxed taffy papers, Christmas lights throwing green
and red onto the tides and almost every hotel vacant but ours, to stay—
and isn't sun the beginning: the gray of the sea lightens only by touch.

Of fire there are only numbers
 5, no 6, no 30—
100,000 Said To Flee
a vision of numbers
just off the highway
a blanket of clouds unraveling again
 but they are bodied over
against me and have to do with
 me and where were you
the river speaks to us when it rises
 I lost my little girl and I never found her

it pulls the water hyacinths
again and my little girl was shouting
out of its banks we see them
at me asking me *that's all*—
float by and know the river
I'm waiting for
in a green tent not
far from the city the only
international communications
powered by short-wave radio
quit the city
quit the city

above the traffic
from another when I have
laid down to rest to spit
out the waiting distracted arms
that hold only wind—
the city breaks through dawn along
these streets and watch the air that swings
around the bodies: women in faded dresses
who know that if your face
gives off no light you will never
become a star and the mornings
soothed by green hands or curled
here on the floor beside you I
should be able to walk from this moment
though I have listened answer
and I cannot say what happened
before I saw you at my bed
and I was tired:

remember the summer
my brother raced his matchbox cars on fire in the street
waving madly at the evidence of smoke
and the city broke where you looked
behind you and see she will make
you say it aloud she

is not like you
does not call the sky
 anything
but given and she does not
leave you will not
 remember and you are
so sorry for her you are so:
sorry for her that you
cannot be cannot
fear in the proper way
in the way that recalls
 the way you let turn
back around to say it *five thousand*
when that does not vary
a thing a thing that wills
the slant of the blue air don't
watch her I can't stand this you
 say here this aloud
has already spelled
 your name in salt is
unbound: follow the five thousand:
 lights of the night rising
here or anywhere—
an aerial view of central Managua
as fires continue
in any city any field that opens
 or will not open there
is no solitude and there is
no source compressed
 beneath the slats: no child.

Notes

CHANGE. In October of 1998 Hurricane Mitch, a class five storm, hit Nicaragua causing floods and mudslides, while also washing out every bridge in the country. In the weeks and months that followed, disease and food scarcity contributed to approximately 6,000 deaths, while hundreds of thousands of people remained homeless.

RESTORATION. "the flaring gold of Nicaraguan sun" and "remote springtime" from Rubén Darío's "Far Away and Long Ago." Vilma Urrutia Martinez quoted from November 1999 issue of National Geographic, "After the deluge: Central America's storm of the century." "You have to stay close to them," Bill Clinton from *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, March 15, 1999 transcript of "Remarks in a roundtable discussion with the Las Casitas Volcano mudslide survivors in Posoltega."

YELLOW. "Good Christ" from William's "The Wind Increases."

MERCADO ORIENTAL. "He stuns you by degrees -" from Dickenson's "He fumbles at your Soul."

MITIGATION. "receive the warmth of the sun's ascending," "unpieced suns" and "orange hoops" from Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. "belly of the land" from George Oppen's "The Book of Job..."

HOTEL COLÓN. "There are teeth marks on everything [you] love" from Yusef Komunyakaa's "The Thorn Merchant" and "low cloud coming over the room" from Komunyakaa's "The Thorn Merchant's Son."

SPIN. "nothing collapses" from Whitman's "Song of Myself", sixth section.

SALTWINDS. "with its sky stained by fire and mud" is Rimbaud from *A Season in Hell*. Water hyacinth lines quoted from Honduran Manuel Cardona in the November 1999 issue of National Geographic, "After the deluge: Central America's storm of the century." Questions and lines about the daughter in that section quoted from Arnaldo Aleman, Esperanza Mirales Acosta and Bill Clinton in Nicaragua, March 15, 1999 transcript of "Remarks in a roundtable discussion with the Las Casitas Volcano mudslide survivors in Posoltega." Published in the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*. "whose face gives off no light shall never become a star" from Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell."